

Poems
by

John Rodker



To be had of the Author

Osborn

Street
Whitechapel

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S.

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CERTAIN of these Poems have appeared in the Egoist, the New Age, and the Manchester Playgoer; while the "London Night" is about to appear in Poetry. To the editors of these periodicals my acknowledgments are due.

J. R.

# *T o*S O N I A

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#### The Poet to his Poems.

Introduction to his First Volume.

"POETS starve so near the stars Because they like to think of bars Of pure bright gold near them in headen, . . And things we hardly understand, Like mystic numbers three and seven-And all the things we know are dead In a dead land. They talk of brains from which 'thought bled'-Poor stricken brains—what could they mean? We're very happy here; we've been Through love and life and such like things, And have not burst our hearts-If our loves leave us, what of that? There's no wound smarts Forever. . . . If our life's flat It's only that we cannot spend All we would. . . . Now should this poet lend Us something . . . (if he could), . We'd show him life more splendid far Than all his dreams or poems are."

#### A Slice of Life.

THE sky broods over the river— The waves tumble and flee. And down go the dead things ever Down to the sea.

A dog, an empty keg, An outworn hat. And with a broken leg A pregnant cat.



#### In the Strand.

DESPERATE and disdainful showed his wares, . . . Stupid things, . . . laces, studs, . . . . I bought . . . his look . . . and this verse.

#### The Gas Flame.

#### To Kathleen Dillon.

THIS yellow, flickering flame
That endless anguished writhes—in endless obscure
pain

Contorted. . . . Thrusting ever upwards till the brain Swoons with its arid pallor, feeling it flicker, . . . aim High . . . and ashrill for clean air. . . . It came Bursting upon its stalk, and sudden drooping in sick bloom Poured down the room;

Trickling into the obscure, obscene places where the brain reels;

Incredibly mute, its pallor weaves me fire,

Bursting and searing the lead eye-balls with false wheels That grate forever, clashing meet and sudden. . . .

Nothing. . . . Then again it writhes and stands incredibly mute,

Swaying in a little weary spire

So very faint. . . .

There is a tale of Arcady, . . . but no . . .

This bloom, this shuddering bloom

That trickles into the obscure, obscene places

Making the brain reel. . . .

There is a tale of Arcady . . . with marshes . . .

And swallows three that headlong wheel . . .

And . . . faces. . . .

But no. . . . This bloom, this shuddering, drooping bloom That trickles into the brain's obscure, obscene places, With clatter of the first boot on the floor And darkness surging sore on brains like ours. . . . Will no one pluck the bloom, the magic, weary bloom That blows but once, ere night droops Very weary in after the long war. . . . There is a tale of Arcady. . . .

#### Soria Moria.

 $\mathbf{P}^{ ext{EYOND}}$  the soul's edges . . .

Drily whisper the sedges.

Patches of the lake gleam mournful white. . . .

There is a hint of billowing towers

And the swish of huddling trees. . . .

But the lake glimmers in the moonlight,

And in some sad places is so giddily deep. . . .

Laughter and jangle of bells, . . . And something asleep. . . .

Laughter and jangle of bells Beyond the soul's edges. . . .

#### Immanence.

COOL water pours
Into dim silence.
Through the tense shade
The musk of far roses
Gloses
The sense. . . . .

Cool water pours . . .

Dissolving thin sleep

From the corners of mind. . . ,

But the eyes are more blind

And the slumber more deep. . . .

The fierce heart o' the rose Bursts in the sun. . . .

. . . cool . . . water . . . pours.

#### The Music Hall.

THE group soul anguished drives up to the vane; Shivers over the clamant band,
And tremulously sinks upon its padded seat, . . .
With such a pleasant shiver of the bowels.
(The first faint peristalt . . .)
And a thin hunger somewhere.
Beauty or woman; something not over-rare
That will absorb the thrill, the gushing energic thrill. . . .
We watch and smoke . . . our trembling hands
That flutter for a space an arc of light
With acrid trailing fume. . .
But oh . . . the hunger. . . .

. . . for the soul is as a little bird mounting to heaven rejoicing, when the bars of thought, which are its cage, lie broken about it. . . .

There is a little room inside my mind With mirrors lined . . . It must be like the eye of some huge fly. . . .

Whoever enters there swoons deep and deep . . . So deep, the scared soul quite forgets to weep . . . And wonders at itself. . . . By and bye

Breasting the night . . . it will forget How distant thrust the light . . . how wet And comforting it drenched him; who might not descry

Nor place nor footing in that blackness . . . ah! so frail . . . Where scaur and precipice were mirrored pale Drifting in icy darkness pitifully . . .

And marvel at the horror of the sight He barely may recall . . . one light Bursting upon one mirror—

Then mirror unto mirror . . . till he saw That swart and anguished wriggling thing; His soul . . . take wing . . .

And ever mounting; higher and more high Warble a song of joy . . . so glad That being found it too might fructify.

#### Under the Trees, II.

T is so desolate:
This blown leaf softly falling, Without sound—and helpless. Each little wind thrills it-Still without sound. Not a bird sings . . . Not a leaf stirs . . . Suddenly the tawny brothers whisper And are silent. A long thin silence. . . . The twilight grows. And now and then the little brothers whisper, And stir softly, And lie still. . . . "Come little sister, You will sleep in a bed all agolden." One star hides in a tree top From its pale mother, The little far moon, Who washes the spangles From her caught children. . . . Poor stars. . . . Little sad wind O touch my hair.

#### Under the Trees, III.

WIND waking in the leaves—
It is cold . . .
And pass wings?

Wind waking in the leaves. Each cold star burns them Till they stir Under its spear.

Wind waking Sad And pitiful.

#### Consummation.

SHE was so tired after the night.
Out of a dream all things grew utter white,
And calm with peace beyond imagining.
With one bird brooding there that dared not sing
But preened one wing.

Out of the widening white haze
Desire now mocked her. All her virgin days
Swung thin and shrivelled; in lush undergrowth
Made ponderous her limbs—and at her mouth
Bittered her lips with drouth.

Yet sweet the bitterness thereof
When each limb had sucked full from limbs of love.
Breast from soft breast and thigh from urgent thigh
And lip from lip . . . while night passed by
Most wearily.

Leaving the needless heart to labour on: Though life grew vain when the dear lust was gone, And yet too tired to wish for Death at all.

#### The Mercury Vapour Lamps.

A T evening the blossom of the sun is blown; Its wantoned vivid music is not heard. Its perfume from the earth for one short night is flown.

Then does its spawn at some dark word.

Swarm into many coloured bloom . . . clustring more strange

Than any shape that any man may know In all those spacious heavenly fields, where change Unending the world-stars . . . where all is flow And ceaseless passionate call and counter-call.

Here where each spore bursts, where fall From some, swift-shooting stars, strong shreds of light. Where some among them whisper in the night; Some whistle shrill . . . some hiss and click, And mutter fearfully, some trick Themselves in scarlet; some in gold. And there are those which stamens hold Fiery serpents fold on fold.

Now does the bloom that guards the night creep out. It writhes from out its nest. Its pallid flow Etiolates the dark: its sullen glow Pierces thro' all things. Now the shout And bustle grow more sinister; the street Glooms pale and waste as any place in hell. While at the hurrying feet Clatters the chase of those proud souls that fell.

It striketh to the heart. It shards the flesh.

The livid faces speak the livid soul;

And each soul shows it livid in the mesh.

Yet will your love not pass through whole.

Her smile shall come two violet back-writhed lips

Round pallid teeth; and her dead hips

Shall no more flex for you . . . ah! the killed joy.

Yet glad in this, Love cannot more make happy or annoy.

O! it is subtle this:

This monstrous spawning of the sun with man.

That cankers in sweet flesh and in each kiss;

And leaves us wandering, all wan

And purposeless within this bruit . . . where none dare wait.

Yet hurrying is quite lost . . . the spate Takes speed . . . and noise . . .

Like a huge worm it sprawls,

Some orchis tangled in some monstrous place.

Where the far light comes trembling under the vast walls

That stretch forever . . .

Yet . . . for a space

Music will rise; a pæan from the sun Though Death creep down 'ere twilight is begun.

#### Sleep-Sick.

JOY has gone out from me—and warmth—And whether she sleep or no
It matters not . . .
Or whether the sleep be long
I will not heed . . .
For my lids grow heavy as night is
Without stars.

Have I not offered up my hours before her pain Till all my days went thin as her own pain? And now my lids grow heavy as night is Without stars . . . And she sleeps.

Whether she sleep or no I must not heed Lest I wake.

Whether she sleep or no I will not heed . . . Or whether the sleep be long I care not now.

#### Spelled.

PEERING through the tangle of her hair I saw
The sun shafts
Splintering.

The enchanted web That was all bronze.

And in cool deeps behind I dreamed . . . While the warm shafts Splintered On that enchanted web Which was all golden Against my eyes.

Till blood grew thin.

#### The Storm.

NO wind in all that place.
Only the sun beating down.
Like sleepy cats we moved within the shade.

And when I touched him
Such a thrill went through my arm
And ceased where my ring was. . . .
It left me tingling. . . .
The air was so full charged
Of the electric force,
It overflowed in mystic flare.
Pale blue, it dazed the sky
Pale blue
And vast
It challenged all the sky.

In the evening
A small chill wind
Brought back the moisture to our veins of wilted flowers.

The rain came Swarming.

Challenging the night the western sky lights up Thundering.

And all the sky is in a flare With all the winds And all the stars Rushing . . . And the rain Swarming.

The moon
Mad queen of the earth,
Walks in the pools,

On the bridge's edge The raindrops burst in spray Dancing.

#### To the London Sparrow.

GAMINS.
Drab and
Cockney.
Wavering
but not much
between feeding and
...!

Thriftless.

Laying up children . . .

Dung growing less too.

What will become of you.

Your four broods yearly . . .

(or is it oftener.)

Will you go back to the country . . . Corrupt poor relations. . . .

#### Vibro-Massage.

MOIST warm towels at my face smell queerly . . . chill me. . . .

I am afraid. . . .

... Unguents
smoothed into my face
like yellow silk
over my forehead.
... smoothed into cheek
into hollow.

Spasm . . .
Stress . . .
Pain . . .
Pressure
of keen sweet tears
from the lachrymals.

Brows
Nose
Cheek
Chin
exploring . . .
murmuring . . .
pulsing. . . .

Body waiting . . . yearning . . . dreading. . . . Again . . . Ecstatic . . . Eyes shut, Body shut, Muscles tense, Ecstacy like a kiss . . . the touch of hated hands. . . . Moist warm towels at my face smell queerly . . . chill me. . . . Cold wet towels burn me . . . their smell of death.

#### The Pub.

HOW long, how very long have I been sitting here. Tongue-tied and fixed within this murmuring stability. Gaunt and immutable—through eyes that see not Dim faces watch me.

The automatic piano plays and plays— I grow sick, with anguish at the heart. The piano thumps, skirls, goes out. I fumble for a penny— More music . . . And again I grow sick.

Huge jewels glow behind the counter Where the light comes through full bottles.

And still they urge me "Drink."
While the black-stoled murmurous figures
Dole the pain
At jingle of the coins.

Why does the barmaid there drink stout Furtively.
Surely her breasts are big enough.

#### The After-Dinner Hooter.

PEACE.

A voice

Raucous, distensive,
Shatters and smashes
Concentrical.
Undermining
Unto the dimmest
Furthest proliferance
Of this pale whiteness.

Shivers the sphere . . . jangling.

Peace . . . trembling . . . Still, still . . . be still!

Jangling, shivering . . . trembling.

Voices.

Shatters the sphere . . . jarring, Bursting, jarring, bursting . . . Still! still! Be still . . . Ah . . .! shivering, BURSTING.

#### Item.

To Margaret Drew.

You said
your heart was
pieces of
strings
in a
peacock blue satin
bag.

#### London Night.

Introduction. Still the void turns . . . And creaks . . . And spatters me With spume of gaunt fatuity . . . And again turns . . . Unceasingly . . . Till the quiet burns. The night is full, with laughter in its wings (And faint wan faces ouched in yearning sky) Laughter that weals the face of night . . . and stings . . . The anguished soul drifts by. I will not go . . . Still the void turns . . . And sickening thuds . . . Creaking . . . Still the quiet burns . . . With flame that floods The secret inner sky . . . And yearns to the sound And to the laughter . . . I am called.

Still the void turns. . . .

Hesitant, . . .

In the bus.

Hum of the town . . . Splashes of faces
In garish places
Drive ever down . . .

float. . . .

In the Park.

The gaunt trees grope to the night.

The distant magic of the night . . .

And touch the sky . . .

The faces linger to the light

And endlessly drift by . . .

With shuffle of far feet like leaves that strike

And flicker on the way . . .

With little ripples of dry sound. . . .

The band.

Noise of the band . . . and the wind asleep . . .

Over the wind I mount on wings

And swing and gleam and sheer and

How chill it is grown . . . and how remote the faces

And thin and very faint. . . And the wind sings. . . .

Interlude.

Shop girl, poor clerk
Ephemerons . . . wing your swift way
A little love—it will not mark

The soul unused to day . . . So cold, so far away you seem Shop girl . . . poor clerk . . .

I am the dreamer. . . . Are you the dream?

How the noise mocks me. . . And the pain!

And they laugh about me. . . . While the trees unheard . . .

Though not to one or three the water calls in vain.

But only as an inner word . . .

For she is much more amorous then—And will, not prize her sweets too dear . . .

(For after all we are poor men

And may not know love . . . though here . . .)

Hyde Park Corner. Stress of the crowd . . . And the whole of it mute . . .

Tunics that thrill in the light . . . till you look at his face

With a rush of hate . . . and hate for the grace

Of the "slavey" wooing the brute.

Stress of the crowd. . . .

Picture Palace. Breathless . . . The giggles cease . . . The ruddled alcove wafts me peace . . . And the clicking of the reel . . . Flicker of light . . . We thrill to the rush and the clatter . . . and spatter The night with our souls and . . . steal The soul of night . . . The girl at the box was very sweet . . . Manicured nails, and massaged smile, and teeth Resplendent . . . Flicker of light . . . The rush and the clatter . . . With dust of fatuity Spattered . . . out of the void. . . . Always the streets and the giggle of girls Women from where? God! but the night must be full of them. . . . Quiet at last . . . she there . . . Anarchist Club. The babble of hot voices strangely soothes . . . The coffee is black . . . Anvernus' waters where The souls disquiets flare . . . And she . . . Her face like halfold ivory A something past its whiteness . . . And cheeks ahollow. . . . Smoking ever talks she

And disdains me quite. Not this the place. Later perhaps she will not say me nay... And ever and anon someone will say "A bas" and "saboter."

How came we here?

Cafè.

The sybaritic waiter brings us drink. . . .

Thick lips and mottled face . . .

. . . I think

His eyes go back to ancient arcadies . . .

in the black

Secret eyes of her . .

She is the beauty at the feast . .

My friends and their friend flock

With words well greased . . .

Very fluent when the ideas flow . . .

Oh! but the babble wearies me

And the lights . . .

And rococo. . . .

Liqueur.

One lotus bud swings to the harbour of my soul
And bursts . . .
And all its mystic whole
And each glad petal . . . thirsts
Unto all heaven . . . far roots
Insinuating . . .

Wondrous fruits
Creating.
Becoming of all things . . .
And God is singing . . .
Such a little song. . . .

My moon, my almond-eyed delight goes from me

And I am old . . .

I am far older than she is . . .

And now she laughs at my grey hairs . . .

Yet may I not put forth to chasten her . . .

Lest she rebel . . .

I will use songs and fair words

To call her to my couch. . . .

Then she shall languish forever In the prison of my "infinite mercy."

Night. . . .
I am afraid.

#### The Descent into Hell.

[This poem should be read many times in order that the time-sense may become so essential a part of the poem as not to interfere with the sequence of the lines.]

A million years has passed.

Woven from many glooms
Out of many glooms
Into many glooms
I was.
I and yet
Not I.

From the light
Woven into the dark.
Part . . . and not part.

Woven into the dark. Part and not part I am.

I was.

A million years pass.

Out of depths
Darkness draws me
down stairs I do not see.
Each; white perfection of form.
And two steps wide.

Two steps wide. . . .

I shall stumble if there are more stairs.

Two steps wide

Each their white perfection of form.

A million years pass.

With naked feet I will walk these stairs . . .

Caress their perfection . . .

The way will be shorter

Each their white perfection of form . . .

Horrible. . . .

A million years pass.

I will walk naked For any coolness that may

be . . .

Many years pass.

There is no coolness.

A million years pass.

I will cast off this mind
That whatever tremor there
may be

Must stir me. . . .

A million years pass.

Nothing . . .

White perfection Black and immobile

Fills me. . . .

A million years pass.

I will think on life.

Many, many years pass.

Each stair

In white perfection of form

Black and dead

Draws me.

A million years pass.

I am not tired.

A million years pass.

But

Many years pass . . .

Down!

Many years pass . . .

Down . . .

Many years pass . . .

Down?

Woven into the dark

I . . . and yet

Not I,

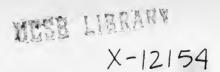
Am . . . Was . . .

Many years pass.

Was?

Many, many years pass.

Am?



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